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SUBJECT Conditions in the Elias Prison Camp
in the Jachymov Area

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1. "There were between 1000 and 1200 prisoners in camp 'Elias'. Prisoners convicted by the state or people's courts (political prisoners) lived in special two-story buildings which were marked Blocs V and VI. These buildings were located so that they could be observed from the guard towers and from the sentry post and were within shooting distance. The camp administrator placed an undercover agent in every cell to report on the behavior of prisoners, debates between prisoners, and eventually to submit a special report about a particular prisoner. These undercover agents were, however, known to many prisoners who spoke very cautiously in their presence. Therefore, the undercover agents often submitted falsified reports about prisoners to show their superiors some activity. The falsely accused prisoners were summoned to the headquarters of the camp or to the office of the elder of the camp where they were beaten in such a way that they almost lost consciousness. Later they were sent to solitary confinement as a corrective measure.
2. "Prisoners who had been convicted by district or regional courts for assault, robbery, murder, etc, lived in other one-story barracks marked Blocs II, III, IV and VII. These prisoners had some advantages as compared with the political prisoners and during various prison meetings they were shown as victims of the capitalist system. Most of the undercover agents were taken from their ranks and many of them worked as 'shockworkers in the mines or in the 'Elias' refinery. Non-political prisoners could purchase anything they wanted in the canteen; they were allowed to receive guests and write or receive letters. They received much better treatment than the political prisoners. The elders of the camp were elected from among the non-political prisoners. They were in charge of prisoner autonomy [sic]. The elders of the camp had their own office and wore special uniforms. In that office prisoners who committed some offence against the Camp Order or did not get a favorable report as far as their employment in the camp was concerned

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SEE LAST PAGE FOR SUBJECT AREA C

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

(insufficient work efficiency, etc) were questioned. The political prisoners were very often beaten by these people. The camp 'elders' were on the whole the worst scoundrels in the camp; convicted murderers or the like who were sentenced to life imprisonment. They were hated by most of the political prisoners, and were the most favored by the administration of the camp or SNB units (police) who did not interfere in the prisoners' autonomy and who, if the undercover agents would not inform them, would not have known anything that happened in the camp.

3. "The guard service in the observation towers and around the camp was performed by SNB (police) members who wore uniforms with red insignia and who were not permitted to enter the camp or to come in contact with prisoners. Guards were replaced every 24 hours.
4. "Administration of the camp was in the hands of other SNB members in the following functions: Commander of the Camp, Deputy Commander of the Camp, Head of Political Education, Cultural Inspector, Labor Chief, Head of Accounting Service for the Prisoners (pecuniary compensation for work), Head of the Food Store, Head of the Canteen and Driver. These people had permanent duty in the camp during which they relieved each other. They lived outside the camp but ate in the camp. All of them without exception treated the political prisoners whom they called reactionaries very badly, promising to beat the reactionary convictions out of their heads. They often tortured political prisoners or made them subjects of corrective measures. The most dangerous among the SNB members in charge of the administration of the camp was the police commissar who was known under various cover names as Sinek, Amal, Cerny, etc. This man used to invent false accusations against the prisoners and to surrender them for punishment to the elders of the camp. The elders beat one such prisoner with wooden sticks until he lost consciousness and then threw him out of the house exposed to a temperature much below the freezing point. No one was allowed to help such a miserable prisoner if he wanted to avoid the same punishment.
5. "In the canteen every prisoner was permitted to buy goods, paying with special stamps. Most of these goods were of bad quality and were not salable to regular customers. Foodstuffs as sausages, fruit or vegetables were available only if they were near spoilage. The head of the canteen in such cases did his best to sell the prisoners goods which the prisoners did not need so much but which were plentiful in the canteen such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, shoe polish, etc. Undercover agents, 'shock-workers' and members of 'socialist circles' were permitted to buy anything they wanted including chocolate bonbons, Hungarian salami, etc. Each third month periodic searches (inspections) were carried out in the buildings. The prisoners called these searches 'filcuncky'. During the searches, often lasting many hours, the prisoners had to stay on the 'appeal place' until the SNB members finished the inspection. Very often after such inspections the prisoners discovered that their more valuable belongings which they had bought in the canteen, like sport shorts (which cost 260 Kcs) and other articles had disappeared. In 1949 and 1950, during which period the prisoners were permitted to receive food packages from their relatives, the most valuable contents of these packages used to disappear after such inspections. If a prisoner complained at the Camp Administration, he was beaten and told that criminal proceedings would be started against him for the offence of the SNB member. In addition to these periodic inspections of the prisoners' barracks, there were also occasional searches of prisoners' rooms. These searches were called 'air raids' by the workers and were mostly carried out as result of a report of some undercover agent. During such 'air raids' the SNB members behaved like wild beasts. For instance, they piled all foodstuffs which the prisoners bought in the canteen in the middle of the room, mixed them with trash and poured slops on the foodstuffs, in order to make them unfit for consumption. They put the prisoners' beds in terrible disorder, cut the straw mattresses and threw the straw on the floor. In these fanatical actions two men in particular distinguished themselves: Sergeant Uber and Sergeant Andrej Kadlick. By this maltreatment of prisoners they made any improvement of the food situation impossible and the prisoners starved, being dependent exclusively on the meager board served in the Camp.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

- 3 -

Prisoners had to work also, after the termination of their eight-hour work per day in the mines, either in cleaning their rooms and the camp, in the guard rooms of the SNB or in fencing the camp, etc. During this work they were urged to faster work (very often even by beating) by the SNB members or by the 'elders'. The slightest opposition or even only an indication of it was punished very strictly by beating or by special corrective measures.

6. "Medical care was insufficient as far as prisoners were concerned. Physicians were mostly chosen from among the prisoners and they were afraid to find a prisoner sick since, if they really declared somebody sick (mostly cases near death), the Commander of the camp or the police commissar protested against such a decision, asserting that the prisoner only pretended to be sick and would be cured by their 'recognized methods'.
7. "Hygiene was practically nonexistent in the camp. For 1,000 to 1,200 prisoners only one washroom with 16 faucets and four showers was available. Very often a prisoner could wash himself only once a week, that is, only in winter, because in summer, if it did not rain for a few days, there was no water in the washroom whatsoever. The prisoners' clothes were changed every six weeks. Because of the scarcity of water and soap in the camp, prisoners were forced to wear shirts and underwear for six weeks. They not only worked but even slept in their clothes. As result of these conditions prisoners were subject to various diseases (very often caused by uranium dust) like skin infections, eye diseases, lice, etc.
8. "The officers in charge of the camp were quite cognizant of the situation but simply did not care and did not want to improve conditions. On the contrary, they made the life of prisoners even worse by various physical punishments. In their opinion 'the less prisoners who return to civilian life, the better for the nation and government'.
9. "The head of the OTK of the 'Elias' mine was the convict Rudolf Skalsky, who, in 1930, was convicted to a life term for the murder of three people. He had already spent 22 years in prison. Skalsky murdered three Czech students in France (probably in Paris). Because the murderer and victims were Czech nationals, the French Government surrendered Skalsky to Czech authorities on condition that the murderer, unless convicted to death or a life term, was to be returned, after his release from prison, to France. Rudolf Skalsky was in full favor with the officers in charge of the camp. He was considered prominent and could treat the political prisoners in any manner he liked. Skalsky gained his prominent position among the prisoners mostly by denunciation of other prisoners and by forcing political prisoners to higher efficiency. Skalsky was a member of the prisoners' autonomy and of the Socialist Circle. Leading officers of the camp considered Skalsky a 'victim of the capitalist system'. His illusory accomplishments were shown as exemplary to the other prisoners and Skalsky, on various occasions, was granted special awards and prizes for his outstanding work. He was hated by all prisoners and on the whole was much more dangerous than any member of the SNB. The camp commander used to say that Skalsky would be dismissed from the camp for his excellent behavior and work efficiency, if only the agreement concerning his person did not exist between Czechoslovakia and France.
10. "There were more people like Skalsky in the camp and they were all in favor with the leading officers of the camp because they did all the 'dirty' work in the camp."

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